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UNCLAS MANAMA 000566

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: MEPI'S "MY ARABIC LIBRARY" GETS A GREEN LIGHT
IN BAHRAIN

REF: MANAMA 000399

1. (U) During a third meeting about MEPI's "My Arabic Library" with senior Ministry of Education officials in Bahrain (February 22, March 16, and April 17), the Ministry of Education approved Bahrain's participation in this project. The approval comes after post's efforts to overcome Ministry concern and in some instances complete rejection of the program by some Ministry staff (see reftel).

2. (U) On April 17, PAO, APAO, Scholastic Inc. Vice President Dr. Carol Sakoian and her regionally based colleagues Michelle Alwan and Bassem Badran met with the Minister of Education to present Ministry officials with a list of titles and 12 sample translations. The Minister welcomed the visit and approved MEPI's "My Arabic Library." He cited the goal of promoting reading among Bahraini youth and the contribution that the "My Arabic Library" can make to this objective. "We need to encourage our children to read and they need interesting books, so I welcome this program. Anything that gets children to put down their Playstation controls is a good thing," he stated. He acknowledged the strong cooperative relationship that exists between the Ministry and the Embassy and affirmed that the "My Arabic Library" initiative would further strengthen that relationship.

3. (U) The Ministry will pursue implementation of the program with caution. Ministry officials made clear their desire to inspect each translated book in detail to ensure cultural sensitivity of the wording, concepts, and pictures. The Scholastic delegation expressed concern to Emboffs that this will delay getting the books into the classroom. However, Ministry officials have insisted that they will examine all the proofs in spite of the delays that may be caused. The Scholastic delegation agreed to send the remaining 28 translated proofs to the Ministry of Education, as they become available, for approval. (Comment: While visiting public schools, APAO and Scholastic delegation noticed pictures of boys and girls wearing shorts on classroom walls and in children's books. APAO noted, and Scholastic VP concurred, that such pictures would not be allowed in the translated books. The Ministry will be exponentially more cautious with the content of the Scholastic books than the content of their own books and classrooms.)

4. (U) The Minister arranged meetings for the Scholastic delegation with other Ministry officials to discuss details and implementation of the program. The Assistant Undersecretary for Curricula and Training, Director of Curricula, and Director of Primary Schools saw proofs of 12 translated books. Their initial reactions were positive. They expressed pleasure with the layout, pictures, and topics of the books. They also discussed plans for training teachers on using the new Arabic library. A tentative training date was scheduled for mid-October.

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